

AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

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ROLES FOR SOF IN A STAGGERING NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is an oil-rich but staggering democracy that has become increasingly important to U.S. strategic interests. The U.S. imports more than 10% of its oil from Nigeria, which holds critical reserves of oil and natural gas. Nigeria is a key partner in the struggle with Islamic extremism in the Sahel region and shares common interest with the U.S. in achieving security in the Gulf of Guinea to secure foreign trade and investment opportunities in Africa. However, Nigeria's persistent internal trends had a negative impact on its development and could even set ablaze the whole area in the near future if not dealt with properly.

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Introduction

If Nigeria were a tree, it would be the biggest of Africa, and oil would be its sap. The sheer number of Nigeria's inhabitants—the most populous country of Africa, with over 144 million of the whole continent's 955 million—makes what happens in Nigeria critical to Africa. This is true even more in sub-Saharan Africa, where the next most populous countries are Ethiopia, with 71 million people, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, with 58 million people. Natural resources, an incipient democracy, and its position between the Sahel region and the Gulf of Guinea (GG) are other factors that make Nigeria pivotal to the whole area. Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa, the eleventh largest producer of crude oil in the world, and holds the tenth position in terms of proved global reserves of oil. It also ranks seventh in the world for proved reserves of natural gas.

Nigeria is also a young democracy. On April 21, 2007, Nigeria held presidential elections, marking the first time in Nigeria's history that the country passed control from one civilian government to another. Nigeria's ability to preserve and then develop this precious gain should be thoroughly encouraged, because this country could become a model of success story for the entire world. Finally, Nigeria's geographical position, between the Sahel region in the north and the GG in the south, makes it a key element when it comes to regional security issues. Nigeria is already part of the U.S.-led Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative (TSCTI), which aims to build indigenous capacity and facilitate cooperation among governments in the struggle with Islamic extremism in the Sahel region.¹ It also shares a common interest with the U.S. in “achieving coastal security in the GG, as it is key to America's trade and investment opportunities in Africa, to its energy security, and to stem transnational threats like narcotics and arms trafficking, piracy, and illegal fishing.”² In other words, if its potential could be harnessed

effectively, the Nigerian “tree” would shade the rest of western Africa under its protective umbrella and lead it to prosperity.

As a Nigerian proverb says, “a tree is best measured when it’s down.”³ If Nigeria is a tree, waiting for it to come “down” will have catastrophic and enduring consequences for the United States of America. Should the U.S. let it fall, the extent of the damage to the whole region will certainly reveal its true height. Nigeria’s persistent internal trends—weak political leadership, corruption, absence of the rule of law, depredation of personal security and freedom—have a negative impact on stability, human security, and economic development in the country. Nigeria, and the other nations in the GG, continue to lose millions of dollars to fish poachers, rampant criminal activity, drugs, arms, human trafficking, inadequate safety, pollution that degrades the environment, and oil theft that plagues petroleum-producing nations.⁴ With a “downed” Nigeria, sectarian violence will prevail, human rights will have no significance, and piracy and trafficking of all kinds will spill over its borders, fostering the harboring of terrorists and destabilization in West Africa. According to the International Crisis Group, there is a real “potential for the persistent levels of violence to escalate with major regional security implications.”⁵ This failed-state scenario looks all the more realistic with regard to the Failed States Index figures, as Nigeria ranked successively 54 in 2005, 22 in 2006, 17 in 2007 and 18 in 2008.⁶ Such a scenario, applied to the most populated country of Africa, dramatically challenges the current U.S. National Security Strategy, “whose liberty at home increasingly depends on the success of liberty abroad.”⁷

Because this oil-rich but failing democracy has the potential to become a major stabilizing regional power, or can set ablaze the whole area in the near future, the time has come for the U.S. to focus on Nigeria. The U.S. intent to champion human dignity, promote democracies, and

encourage peace and stability must subsequently translate into concrete actions. The creation of Africa Command and its doctrine of “Building Partnership Capacity” is a step in this direction. A step further can rapidly be accomplished by assigning the task of actually implementing this doctrine to the newly created Special Operation Command-AFRICOM.

“Building Partnership Capacity” is a recent U.S. foreign policy initiative, and the conduct of “sustained security engagement through military-to-military programs, military-sponsored activities, and other military operations as directed to promote a stable and secure African environment”⁸ is the heart of AFRICOM’s mission statement, approved by the Secretary of Defense in May 2008. The recent creation of the Special Operations Command-AFRICOM, as the first step towards an actual implementation of AFRICOM’s mission, suggests that Special Operations Forces (SOF) will be the cornerstone of this new policy. This makes sense because SOF possesses “the experience and unique capabilities needed to be the primary military force used in support of AFRICOM.”⁹ Besides, “SOF forces have been and continue to be the U.S. military force of choice for operations and exercises within Africa.”¹⁰ Culturally attuned, experienced in working with coalition and interagency partners, and with their small and unobtrusive footprint, SOF is the appropriate force to become integrated into a complex multicultural patchwork which is still very sensitive to anything that could be identified with colonialism. Their ability to operate “by, with, through” surrogate forces and their very large set of core activities make them an essential asset to building partnership. Admittedly, several years will probably be required before consistent results appear. Moreover, SOF cannot, and should not, address all Nigeria’s issues by their own. Nevertheless, they can be the catalyst for more effectiveness in Nigerian’s efforts to secure their country. If so, the important question is: what

is the best way of using U.S. SOF to achieve, at the operational level, the strategic goal of helping Nigeria become a stable regional power in Western Africa?

This paper contends that the best way of using U.S. SOF in helping Nigerians in the vast enterprise of stabilizing their country is to focus on four lines of operations that directly address Nigeria's critical issues. U.S. SOF will primarily have to foster a strong interagency cooperation in the Northern states to address specifically the overwhelming poverty in order to deny support of the population to extremist organizations. It will have to work at undermining the expansion of Islamism, easing religious tensions and counter-insurgencies by actively implementing psychological operations all over the country. It will have to conduct foreign internal defense missions to improve the skills of the Nigerian armed forces in fighting insurgencies in the Southern states and ensuring basic maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Lastly, it will have to enhance Nigeria's regional leadership by fostering cooperation with neighboring countries through the creation of several Nigeria-led regional military schools. Before developing these recommendations, this paper first identifies the critical factors that characterize the environment in which SOF has to operate in Nigeria, and then explains why U.S. SOF is well suited for this job.

Nigeria's critical factors

This section does not offer a classical political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information (PMESII) analysis of Nigeria, for this type of assessment can be found abundantly among the latest papers published on this country. Instead, the author took advantage of his own experience as a SOF operator to focus on factors that are of interest for SOF to study, either because they specifically shape the operating environment, or because they present a high potential for leverage. From a SOF perspective, most of the difficulties encountered by Nigeria

are classical. Nigeria's president Amaru Yar'Adua's seven-points agenda¹¹—power and energy, food security and agriculture, wealth creation and employment, mass transportation, land reform, security, and qualitative and functional education—which aims at addressing the major issues his country experiences, is compelling by itself and easily helps us to depict what this “classical” operating environment looks like. Lack of political culture, over-concentration of power, inverted priorities, nepotism, tribalism, gross mismanagement and corruption are also present in this country.¹² However, extreme diversity, excessive poverty, high potential for expansion of Islamism, lingering insurgency, rising maritime criminality, competent armed forces and regional ambitions are the ingredients that give the specific flavor of the Nigerian cocktail.

A cultural patchwork

With 400 languages and approximately 350 ethno-linguistic groups, Nigeria can indubitably be dubbed a cultural patchwork. Three dominant groups, the Ibo, Yoruba and Hausa, comprise 60 percent of the population.¹³ The Ibo and Yoruba mainly occupy the south of the country and are generally Christians. The Hausa group mainly lives in the northern part and favors Islam as a religion. Because Nigeria's borders are the product of agreements set by the former colonial powers in the area and not the achievement of one people's will, the concept of nation is still more tied to tribal roots in Nigerians' minds than to the idea of country. Politics and ethnicity are fully intertwined in Nigeria, and a well-balanced representation of the cultural diversity in the governmental institutions is key for this young democracy to mature successfully and overcome its overwhelming difficulties. The current presidential ticket itself reflects that necessity as the president, Amaru Yar'Adua, comes from the northern province of Katsina, and the vice president, Goodluck Jonathan, is native to the southern Bayelsa State in the heart of the oil-producing Niger Delta region. Thus, to ease the frictions generated by such a variety of cultural identities,

Nigeria has developed a federal model that is “unique in channeling the expression of regional loyalties and affinities through twelve northern states of Hausa emirate origin, twelve Middle Belt states rife with minorities, and twelve states of Yoruba and Ibo, or related confession.”¹⁴

Extreme poverty in the Northern states

Poverty is what primarily characterizes the northern half of the country. Despite the fact that Nigeria's 2.5 million barrels per day account for nearly 80 per cent of government revenues, more than 70% of the population lives in poverty, and Nigeria ranks 158th out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI).¹⁵ Based on education, longevity and income, there are wide disparities between the North and the South of the country. Infant mortality is high in the North, recording 87.7 for every 1000 live births in the Northeast and 109.8 for every 1000 live births in the Northwest.¹⁶ Life expectancy is as low as 36.6 years in the northern Kaduna state, and respectively reaches 36.7 and 37 years in the Bauchi and Borno ones, whereas life expectancy is 61.4 years in the southern city of Lagos and 60 years in Imo.¹⁷ Poverty, hunger, destitution, lack of education, lack of health facilities, inadequate housing, cruel economic realities and political instability are overwhelming, and draw Nigeria's Northern states towards an “abject” poverty, as Umar H. D. Danfulani, Associate Professor of History of Religions at the University of Jos, argues in an essay published in the book *Comparatives Perspectives on Shari'ah in Nigeria*.¹⁸

The Shari'ah

The second aspect that characterizes the North is that twelve states are ruled by Shari'ah. Indeed, the northern population of Nigeria is mainly Muslim, and people consider that Shari'ah is a way of life. They regard Shari'ah as an expression of God's will.¹⁹ Shari'ah was not established by force, as occurred in some other countries like Afghanistan when the Taliban took

over in 1996. Instead, the establishment of the Shari'ah was a bottom-up process. Even if politicians in power in 2001 were not in favor of introducing the full Shari'ah, "it was a popular movement they were unable to resist."²⁰ Many reasons explain this revival of religion in the Northern states. Ousmane Kane, Associate Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia, analyzes it partly as a "reaction to the threat posed to local identity by the intensification of global interconnectedness."²¹ In other words, Shari'ah conveys a sense of unity for all Nigerian Muslims because it helps them in their quest for national identity. They also see the Shari'ah as a means to oppose Christian influence which is strongly implanted in every layer of the government. Abdulkader Tayob, researcher on Islam and Public life in Africa currently based at the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands) confirms this view when he writes that "Christian influence is the very nature of the state and the law" in Nigeria."²² Also, the Shari'ah may merely be the heir of 40 years of harsh ruling by military regimes that banned even the idea of political activity. Therefore, religions came to "fill a vacuum in Nigeria created by the absence of party politics."²³

Islamism

With twelve states suffering from an "abject" poverty and ruled under the Shari'ah, the way toward Islamism is inescapable. This cannot be a surprise in a country where rapid and massive urban transformation occurs, and where the youth, numerous and disaffected, is subject to alienation and frustration—two decisive factors in the appeal of Islamism according to Robert I. Rotberg. Indeed, the president of the World Peace Foundation and director of the Belfer Center's Program on Intrastate Conflict in the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University explains in his book *Crafting the New Nigeria* how unemployment, lack of education, and inexistent social mobility frustrate urban youth's expectations and lead them on the path of

extremism. He anticipates “a come back to a puritanical and egalitarian way of life, reducing the social gap by taking from the rich and giving to the poor.”²⁴ Andy Genasci, student of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in 2006, identifies in his research paper “Overt indicators of Islamic extremism in Nigeria”²⁵ the existence of Islamic extremist safe havens in Nigeria, as well as the presence of numerous madrassas. Kane, in his book *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria*, points out the members of an Islamist organization called the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition who pay “no respect to the Nigerian national anthem, burn the Nigeria flag, attack women who dress in a western fashion.”²⁶ The Society is so well organized that it “parallels in many respects the administrative organization of the Nigerian federation”²⁷ Through this organization, “Islamists make the implementation of the Shari’ah the main item of their agenda.”²⁸ Surely, there is ground for Islamism to expand in the Northern states of Nigeria, and therefore for the development of transnational terrorist groups fed by this type of ideology.

Oil-driven unrest in the South

The first characteristic of the Southern states is that they produce all the oil of the country. The incomes generated by oil production obviously arouse keen interest from multiple criminal parties, and therefore are at the origin of the instability of the region. The most famous of these organizations is the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, more commonly called the MEND. Its members are unemployed youth who originally took up arms to demand a more equitable distribution of Nigeria's oil wealth. They intend to coerce the federal government by using violence, sabotage and kidnapping tactics to create constant unrest in the area. Their actions are far from being negligible, as the MEND has shut off approximately 711,000 barrels per day (bpd) of Nigeria's output of 2.5 million bpd.²⁹ According to the CRS Report for

Congress related to AFRICOM, world oil prices have been affected by Nigerian political developments and by periodic attacks on pipelines and other oil facilities in the Delta.³⁰ MEND also abducts employees working for foreign companies doing business in the area, in an attempt to deter international corporations from sending a skilled work force into the country and to draw the attention of the international community to their demands.

From unrest to insurgency

Since 2001, terrorist organizations like the MEND have gained power, and merged with criminal cartels like the drug trade to finance their activities.³¹ They feel strong enough to dictate their own rules to the local government, and even directly threat the military leadership. For instance, at the end of November 2008, Nigerian militants threatened to bring chaos to the western Niger Delta by interrupting shipping and attacking oil and gas facilities run by Chevron unless the region's commander was removed. The Ijaw Youth leaders Forum (IYLF) said it wanted Brigadier General Wuyep Rintip, commander of the joint military task force in the western delta, transferred immediately because he had taken a tougher line on oil-related crime than his predecessor.³² Unrest has mostly been in Rivers state in the East, where the MEND has blown up pipelines and flow stations. Delta and Bayelsa, the two other main oil-producing states, have been comparatively quiet. Their governments have “preferred to ‘settle the boys’—negotiate with the militants and award them ‘security contracts’—rather than take an overtly military strategy.”³³

Maritime insecurity

The second main concern relating to the Southern states is maritime security along the 836 km of Nigerian coastline and more generally in the Gulf of Guinea. According to the International Maritime Bureau, Nigeria accounted for 10 of the 49 attacks on vessels registered

worldwide in the first quarter of 2008, more than 20%, and has become "the number one hot spot" for piracy.³⁴ In addition, the inability of African governments to police adequately the region's waters has fostered illegal fishing and trafficking. Criminal organizations smuggle people, drugs, and weapons. They also dump hazardous waste in the water, aggravating an already critically damaged environment. Hence, they openly threat maritime commerce and offshore oil production facilities with piracy and sabotage.³⁵

Most capable armed forces in Western Africa

Nigeria is the sixth military power in Africa, and maintains the most capable military in western Africa. The Ministry of Defense seeks to provide a modern, well-trained, fully-professional military, capable of fulfilling the Nigerian military's constitutional responsibilities. Defending the country, including its maritime interests and airspace, protecting the Nigerian constitution, and performing in international peacekeeping are the core missions of the armed forces. During the last decade, Nigeria has employed its military in three major roles: countering lawlessness in the northern and southern provinces, combating various insurgencies and unlawful gangs such as the MEND, and supporting peacekeeping operations externally as part of United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) forces.³⁶ The active duty military in the three Nigerian armed services totals approximately 76,000. The Nigerian Army, the largest branch, has demonstrated its capability to mobilize, deploy, and sustain battalions in support of peacekeeping operations within Africa as well as Yugoslavia. The Navy is equipped with frigates, fast attack corvettes, and coastal patrol boats. The Air Force flies transport, trainer, helicopter, and fighter aircraft, but most are currently not operational.³⁷ The Nigerian Special Forces include an air defense battalion, a paratroop brigade, and a commando battalion.³⁸

Regional ambitions

Being the most modernized and functional military in the region, Nigeria certainly has the potential to take the lead in future coalition units. Taking the lead in regional affairs is certainly a character trait of the Nigerian spirit. Both media and government take pride in Nigeria's ability to serve as leaders and co-equals within the international community. Nigeria plays active roles in a significant number of regional and international organizations such as the AU, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the ECOWAS.³⁹ In addition, Nigeria has consistently ranked in the top ten troop contributing countries to UN peacekeeping operations in recent years.⁴⁰ President Umaru Yar'Adua clearly expressed the will of his country to play a major role in Africa's security during his visit to Washington, D.C. in December 2007. He actually stated that his country "shall partner with AFRICOM to assist not only Nigeria, but also the African continent to actualize its peace and security initiative."⁴¹ In summary, Nigerians are a proud people who intend to play an important role on the African stage by using cooperation through its armed forces to bring stability to the continent.

Why SOF are the tool of choice in Nigeria

Several characteristics support the use of SOF to establish a robust military cooperation between the U.S. and Nigeria. First, they offer a small footprint, which is key in a country that still vividly remembers colonial domination, still resents its military for 45 years of harsh ruling and uses anti-western nationalism as a basis to develop its own national identity. Second, the creation of AFRICOM, coupled with the Joint Combined Exchange Training law, offers a cooperation framework that allows the maximum of effectiveness in the employment of SOF abroad. Lastly, U.S. SOF has gained considerable experience in training foreign forces, and have already coped with situations that present similarities with Nigeria.

Vivid reminder of the colonial era

Nigeria earned its independence from Britain in 1960 and it has taken more than 45 years of an often-harsh military transition to see the first sign of a sustainable state of democracy-- the hand-over of power between two civilians in 2007. Like most African countries, Nigeria is now jealously guarding its sovereignty. Dr. Wafula Okumu, Head of the African Security Analysis Programme at the Institute for Security Studies, Pretoria, South Africa, stated in August 2007 during his testimony given to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, that "Africans are presently experiencing the exuberance of self-importance and confidence to drive their own destiny. There is a prevailing mood on the continent to reassert African self-worth and self-determination."⁴² Nigeria is no exception to this trend. Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs made this clear in December 2007 when he stated his country's position on AFRICOM: "African governments have the sovereign responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security on the continent."⁴³ In other words, Nigeria will probably not agree to host highly visible foreign troops on its soil, not only because it would be a painful reminder of the colonial era, but also because it would harm Nigeria's ambition for regional leadership.

Indeed, Nigeria truly shares Africa's common positions that the continent's defense and security must be enforced by African countries themselves. Hosting U.S. troops with a heavy U.S. footprint would seriously question Nigeria's ability to solve its problems by itself, which would deeply hurt the pride of its people and certainly affect its neighbors' perception that Nigeria can be a leading actor on African stage. Nigeria would also be highly criticized by other African countries because having the U.S. largely assisting Nigeria would violate the multilateral approach Africans have recently chosen to solve Africa's problems. Undeniably, multilateralism

allows sharing meager resources in the most efficient manner and is helpful in preventing the return of any colonial domination on the continent. Africans expect donors to funnel their support through multilateral organizations like the UA or ECOWAS because they see it as the only path to break away from their usual internal encumbrances. Hence, having one country—Nigeria in this case—being the major beneficiary of U.S. aid in the region would be perceived as a stab in the back by most of the African countries.

Vivid reminder of military domination

Nigerians not only have a vivid reminder of what colonialism is, but they also have little appetite for a too powerful military presence within their borders. The sheer size of the armed forces—76,000 men for 144 millions of inhabitants—seems very inadequate when compared to the total military force of 1.1 million that the U.S. sustains for a population of 300 millions citizens. This is a very small military force for a country that used to be ruled by strong military regimes. By comparison, the Nigerian civilian police force, manned by 372 000 men, looks disproportionate. Admittedly, Nigeria is a populous country and most of its citizens live in urban environments where police forces are arguably more adequate to cope with internal security affairs than military forces. Nevertheless, this ratio of five police officers to one soldier probably results more from a political will to counter-balance the military junta than from the quest for effectiveness.

Indeed, another sign of the Nigerians' mistrust vis-a-vis their military forces is the lack of criticism the media expresses regarding their armed forces. Articles on the Ministry of Defense are infrequent and criticism barely exists. This is rather surprising for a press that is generally very virulent in its criticism of Nigerian politics. In addition, the media shed light on the military only when the armed forces are involved in peculiarly violent situations like scenes of sectarian

violence in the Middle Belt or counterterrorist actions in the Delta area. In other words, the Nigerian press unconsciously projects the image of a violent military institution. Combined with the aforementioned absence of criticism, it signifies that Nigerian journalists still fear retaliation from a junta known for its brutality.

Therefore, probabilities are high that Nigeria's society as a whole still fears a potential return of its military rulers. This means that Nigerians will be little inclined to make their military stronger than they are today. A dramatic improvement in the capabilities of the military will not resonate very well in Nigerians' ears, because it will certainly be perceived as a potential threat to the young civilian-led democracy. Therefore, Nigerians will definitely rebuke any large-scale cooperation with the U.S. aimed at reinforcing the overall power of their military. However, they will surely accept some degree of assistance if it helps their military instrument to cope more effectively with local specificities like maritime security, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism, or if it helps to support Nigeria's regional ambitions to conduct and lead peacekeeping operations in an international environment. As a result, only a clear and limited cooperation between U.S. SOF and Nigerian armed forces can realistically be successful. This is even truer in a place where anti-western feelings are deeply rooted.

Antiwestern nationalism

Because of the colonial era, Africa perceives western civilization as selfish and concerned only with its own interests. African people still vividly remember that goodhearted missionaries preceded colonialism and any proposition of cooperation coming from a western power is *de facto* perceived as a winner-loser deal, the loser being obviously the Africans. As the beacon of the western world, the U.S. is not spared by this bias. AFRICOM, for instance, is "seen as the best way of promoting American interests in Africa: securing investments and oil sources,

fighting off Chinese competition and waging the war against terrorism."⁴⁴ For example, Nigerian journalist Dulue Mbachu also fears that the U.S. will favor their own goals without concern for the fate of African parties. He writes that an "increased U.S. military presence in Africa may simply serve to protect unpopular regimes that are friendly to its interests, as was the case during the Cold War, while Africa slips further into poverty."⁴⁵ If African countries generally acknowledge that the providing of military advisors is generous, they still think that it can easily turn into the sending of conventional forces and a full blown military intervention on African soil. Dr. Wafula expresses this type of concern when he anticipates a scenario where "AFRICOM could provide Nigerian armed forces training to combat the Niger Delta insurgency, which could later be upgraded to limited special operations to rescue American hostages and hunt down those who have attacked American economic interests."⁴⁶ This vision of a western world caring only about itself without further considerations for the others has begot anti-western feelings in many Africans countries like Nigeria. The sheer number of babies named after Yassir Arafat, Saddam Hussein and Bin Laden is a good indicator of this resentment.⁴⁷ Moreover, Nigerians, like many other Africans, see anti-western nationalism as the best option to build their own national identity. According to Kane, Nigeria's "anti-western nationalism is a factor in the rise of movements for religious or political reform."⁴⁸ In other words, it helps Nigerians to determine their own values by opposing them to western ones.

For all these reasons—a vivid reminder of colonial domination, resentment vis-à-vis the military and anti-western nationalism—U.S. forces must have a small footprint on Nigeria soil. As the USAF Irregular Warfare Concept recommends, the DoD must be able to sustain a persistent but low-visibility presence in countries where U.S. forces have not traditionally

operated.⁴⁹ To meet this objective, the DoD can rely on appropriate already existing framework for this new security assistance program.

AFRICOM

The recent creation of AFRICOM as a geographic combatant command is evidence of U.S. understanding that operating with a small footprint is essential for the management of African issues. With a \$389 million budget for FY 2009, a manpower of one thousand people, a headquarters located in Germany, and no standing force based on Africa's soil, AFRICOM clearly does not project the image of an invading power. It sends messages to the African people that are different from those usually issued by former colonial powers. Cooperation, multilateralism, partnership are emphasized, as the U.S. seeks to "enhance the skills of the host nation's forces, forge lasting relations with foreign officials, and help teach the proper role of the military in civil society."⁵⁰ AFRICOM's personnel requirements offer more room for a civilian staff than others GCCs and expresses the U.S. will to better balance the use of its instruments of power (IOP) for the purpose of cooperating with other countries. With no permanent basing in Africa, and the creation of a Theater Special Operations Command (TSOC) as the sole standing operational headquarters, the Military IOP is no longer to be perceived as a "big M." Conversely, the use of SOF will provide a low visible tool—a small "m"—dedicated to fostering security assistance on the premise that it will enable other partnerships in a variety of domains, like justice, administration, health, and the like.

The on-going AFRICOM-led Operation Enduring Freedom: Trans Sahara (OEF-TS) provides a good example of a successful collaboration resting essentially on the employment of SOF in support of a broad security assistance mission. In effect, OEF-TS aims "at defeating organizations by strengthening regional counter-terrorism capabilities, enhancing and

institutionalizing cooperation among the region's security forces, promoting democratic governance, discrediting terrorist ideology, and reinforcing bilateral military ties with the United States."⁵¹ This operation provides military support to the Trans Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP) program, which is a State Department-led initiative. The OEF-TS partnership comprises the United States and eleven African countries, including Nigeria, and seeks to improve intelligence, command and control, logistics, and border control, and to execute joint operations against terrorist groups.⁵² Thus, AFRICOM offers an appropriate framework for the U.S. and Nigeria to work together.

Joint Combined Exchange Training

Many U.S.-led security assistance training programs are already at work in Nigeria and can be used to reinforce the military cooperation between the two countries. However, when it comes to foster military cooperation through the employment of SOF abroad, the most adequate tool is the Joint Combined Exchange Training (JCET). In 1991, Congress enacted sec. 2011 of title 10 of the U.S. Code, more commonly known as the JCET law. The statute provides the commander of the Special Operations Command with broad authority to pay for the deployment of SOF abroad to train with foreign security forces. The law also allows the commander to pay “incremental expenses”—such as those of rations, fuel, ammunition, and transportation—of the host country if that nation is unable to pay them.⁵³ In Africa, JCET personnel have conducted basic training for an evaluation of armed forces involved in the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI), a multinational African peacekeeping force being organized jointly by the State and the Defense Departments.⁵⁴ Training with Nigerian forces even occurred in 2004 at the army's amphibious training school, near Calabar, capital of Cross River State.⁵⁵

Although the primary purpose of the law is the training of U.S. SOF abroad in order to enhance the sophistication of their skills—including knowledge of foreign cultures and languages as well as experience in foreign terrain and climates—there are many added advantages to this program. The Air Force Special Operations Command anticipates that bilateral and multilateral joint exercises with African militaries will “strengthen regional security ties, ensure access, cultivate habitual relationships, add prestige and credibility to partner nations, decrease the number of U.S. personnel in harm’s way, and potentially prevent problems from evolving into strategic regional concerns which may later require the involvement of U.S. forces.”⁵⁶ However, the most important payoff Nigerians can expect from this future cooperation is that they will benefit from the tremendous experience U.S. SOF has already accumulated in shaping environments.

Experience gained from other theaters

Assisting foreign forces to help the host nation (HN) to prevent a wider conflict is not new for U.S. SOF. They have constantly shaped peacetime environments by employing indirect approach to meet their objectives. They have gained considerable experience in training foreign forces, and have already coped with situations that present similarities with Nigeria. They have helped numerous indigenous units to protect critical economic infrastructure, increase border security, counter drug trafficking, or eradicate terrorism. For instance, the SOF mission in Colombia trained units that were the defenders of the oil pipelines, a key piece of economic infrastructure in the region frequently targeted by insurgents.⁵⁷ They also provided direct training support to units engaging FARC and ELN insurgent groups. Over a three-year period, the U.S. deployed SOF at company strength to train the Colombians in individual skills and tactics from squad to the battalion level. They also familiarized the Colombians with helicopter

operations.⁵⁸ Lessons learned from Colombia could certainly be of value in the training of Nigerians forces, for whom protecting oil pipelines and fighting insurgency are two key tasks in the south of the country. Lessons learned in El Salvador during the 1980s could also be useful to address all the trafficking issues upon which insurgency relies for income. Indeed, U.S. advisors trained and equipped indigenous aviation forces and gave the Salvadorian government unmatched mobility, ISR capability, and the ability to destroy drug-related cash crops.⁵⁹

More recently, during Operation Enduring Freedom-Republic of Philippines, U.S. SOF successfully eradicated the Abu Sayyef terrorist group rooted on Basilan Island. U.S. forces were limited to advising, training and assisting indigenous troops in their fight against terror. This experience is peculiarly interesting for two reasons. First, U.S. SOF conducted a thorough assessment of the overall needs of the population on the island and mainly conducted Civil Affairs operations to fill the gaps like building roads, and providing drinking water or medical care. By relying heavily on indirect actions, they succeeded in reinforcing the government's legitimacy by severing popular support to the terrorists. The second interesting side of this operation is that one third of the population was Christian while the rest was Muslim. This means that U.S. SOF has already experienced this dual religious environment which is specific to Nigeria. Therefore, this experience might be adjusted to Nigerian proportions and adapted to the Middle Belt states where Muslim and Christian communities blend.

U.S. SOF has also gained useful experience in Africa. Operation Enduring Freedom-Trans-Sahel, mentioned previously, focuses on the indirect approach, and has already provided a valuable feedback on how to handle the population living in countries to the north of Nigeria. For example, elements of the 10th Special Forces Group and naval special warfare units enabled CA teams to successfully support the attaché's humanitarian assistance program in Chad during a

joint campaign between March 2007 and January 2008.⁶⁰ They have supported many reconstruction and humanitarian projects and helped bring medical support to some of the most isolated parts of the country. The joint special operations team in Chad has been the key to linking the various forces into an effective, interoperable tool to achieve the joint force commander's objectives.⁶¹ The same observation of effective inter-agency cooperation can be recognized in Operation Enduring Freedom-Horn of Africa (OEF-HOA). Indeed, the Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) offers “military assistance and training to Ugandan military forces, works with NGOs to provide medical supplies, conducts civilian-military operations as part of an effort to ‘win hearts and minds’ and enhances the long-term stability of the region.”⁶² As well as digging wells, building and repairing schools, hospitals and roads, and supporting humanitarian assistance efforts, SOF is also able to train the region's security forces in counter-terrorism, collect intelligence, serve as advisors to peace operations, and conduct activities to maintain crucial maritime access to Red Sea routes.⁶³ Nigeria's northern states would certainly benefit from this dual competence as addressing poverty is a prerequisite for any counter-terrorism actions in this area.

Recommendations for the use of U.S. SOF in Nigeria

Arguably, if SOF is the appropriate tool to help Nigeria to address its security issues, its commitment should primarily serve U.S. national interests—namely maintaining access to natural resources and winning the long war against transnational terrorism. Nevertheless, the U.S. must understand that Nigerians do not regard international terrorism as a major threat to their livelihood. Addressing it is not a top priority as far as security is concerned compared to urban violence, religious conflicts, and disorders related to insurgencies. As Dr. Wafula puts it, Nigeria “is being terrorized by hunger, diseases (HIV/AIDS, malaria, etc), lack of life basics,

oppressive laws, bad leadership, poor governance, unfair terms of international trade, [and] foreign debt.”⁶⁴ In other words, the U.S. has to be seen as actually addressing Nigerians basic needs first, not as overseeing a surrogate nation whose leadership is accountable first to U.S. security and economic interests. U.S. forces must strictly stick to the Department of Defense Directive number 3000.05, which clearly states that the “long-term goal is to help develop indigenous capacity for securing essential services, a viable market economy, rule of law, democratic institutions, and a robust civil society.”⁶⁵

To succeed in the vast enterprise of helping Nigerians to stabilize their country, U.S. SOF must direct its actions toward Nigeria’s critical issues. It must primarily enhance a strong interagency cooperation in the Northern states to address specifically their overwhelming poverty in order to deny support of the population to extremist organizations. It must work at undermining the expansion of Islamism, easing religious tensions and counter-insurgencies by actively implementing psychological operations all over the country. It must conduct foreign internal defense missions in the Southern states to improve the skills of the Nigerian armed forces in fighting insurgencies and ensuring basic maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. Lastly, U.S. SOF must enhance Nigeria’s regional leadership by fostering cooperation with neighboring countries through the creation of several Nigeria-led regional military schools.

Civil affairs operations

When it comes to assisting local population from a humanitarian perspective, SOF relies usually on its civil affairs (CA) specialists to cope with the situation. Nevertheless, the sheer size of the theater and the extent of the difficulties encountered by northern Nigerians merely makes the idea of limiting humanitarian assistance to U.S. SOF actions only unrealistic. Besides, SOF’s vocation is not humanitarian assistance by itself, even though it sometimes use it to meet its

objectives. Instead, SOF must provide security to enable the work of aid agencies more competent in assisting the population, like for example the United Nations Development Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross, or USAID. Most important, they must reinforce Nigeria's governmental legitimacy in remote locations of the country by putting an official Nigerian face on each of the U.S.-backed actions. Lastly, it has to foster communication between the various organizations working in the field and the local government in an attempt to unifying the efforts of all the parties present.

With such specifications the best way for SOF to respond to Nigerians' list of grievances is to constitute the backbone of a broadly-chartered people-centric standing organization—a Combined Joint Civil-Military Operations Task Force (CJCMOTF), overarching the distribution of a network of remote centers directly inspired by the Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) model. This would be a joint interagency organization in line with SOCAFRICA's approach which would “fully integrate interagency partner nation capabilities into the planning and execution of operations.”⁶⁶ The CJCMOTF is the natural extension of the JCMOTF, an already existing conceptual organization that makes room for SOF and conventional forces⁶⁷ with the difference here that the billeting may not include conventional forces in this case, but SOF, Foreign Service Officers, representatives from other U.S. agencies, NGOs, Nigerian government representatives, and even personnel of private corporations. The PRT-like centers, arbitrarily dubbed Nigeria's Building Teams (NBTs) for the purpose of this paper, are meant to operate in austere areas where Nigeria's official structures are inexistent. They would host SOF operators, CA teams, members of the State Department, USAID, NGOs and local government members, and would be directly in touch with the locals. This should be a very flexible organization tailored in size and competence to meet Nigeria's requirements.

SOF teams are essential to construct this type of structures because “they provide a tactical element with a broad range of skills and the maturity to execute mission orders without detailed oversight.”⁶⁸ In other words, they have the unique capability of offering an adaptable level of security to people from other agencies without constraining too much their ability to do their job. Flexibility is a key attribute when people with very different backgrounds and who usually do not tolerate the constraints of military-type discipline are required to work together for the accomplishment of a common objective in an austere and sometimes violent environment. SOF also needs to be fully integrated into these NBTs, because CA activities will provide an excellent opportunity to make contact with all layers of Nigeria’s population which is crucial when it comes to identifying terrorist networks or other criminal activities that are deeply intertwined in the population. Thanks to a well distributed presence in Northern Nigeria, and thanks to the variety of actors involved in these NBTs, SOF will be able to establish quickly a wide network of relationships far beyond the scope of what military patrols can usually hope to achieve. This will help it to understand better how Nigerian society works, who the key actors of this society are, and how to help Nigerian forces to get rid of Islamist organizations that expand on their soil. This will also enhance their ability to implement psychological operations with their Nigerian counterparts to concentrate on all issues Nigeria encounters.

Psychological Operations

In a country where much of the population is uneducated and still respects oral tradition, where “thousands of people have lost their lives...because of unfounded rumours,”⁶⁹ psychological operations (PsyOps) can certainly be a powerful tool to tackle many of Nigeria’s issues. The sheer number of ethnic groups and the level of sectarian violence regularly recorded in a town like Jos, Plateau State,⁷⁰ shows that to some extent Nigerians do not understand each

other and that they are strangers to each other. By aiming at influencing “emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior”⁷¹ of targeted audiences, PsyOps can contribute to undermine the expansion of Islamism in northern Nigeria, mitigate sectarian violence or counter insurgencies in the south of the country. Hence, the idea is to help Nigerian Special Forces to create a Combined Psychological Operations Task Force (CPOTF) dedicated to operate in their own country.

In such an organization, U.S. SOF would have a mentoring role and would provide the necessary hindsight that will be required to overcome the inescapable biases Nigerians have about their own people. Moreover, letting the HN develop its own messages so it can target the right audiences will be more effective and faster than trying to operate with U.S. means only. Integrating Nigerians into such a sensitive structure will certainly prove challenging for U.S. SOF because of the drastic operational security side of this type of operations. Nevertheless, Nigeria’s cultural patchwork makes it mandatory to say nothing of the fact that the Nigerian government will never agree to let the U.S. “manipulate” its people alone. Moreover, the past experience of the British in Malaya could inspire the building of this combined organization, as the “Psywar section”—mostly manned by Chinese ex-terrorists—“played a large role in the success of the counter-insurgency effort.”⁷² The standing CPOTF currently operating in South Korea may also serve as a model for Nigeria.

The task of the CPOTF will have three facets. It will have to formulate an information operation campaign that will attack the ideological foundation of Islamic extremism in order to counter the Wahhabist message in northern Nigeria, persuade the mass of the people that the government is capable of providing essential services, and convince the southern fighters to surrender and provide information about their comrades. The vastness of the country and the

fact that part of it is still living in the Stone Age whereas cities like Lagos host more than ten million inhabitants living in a modern fashion means that the CPOTF will need a large number of tools to operate. On the one hand, pamphlets, leaflets and loudspeaker aircraft may be employed to reach the most isolated parts of the country as the British did in Malaya. On the other, mobile phones and high-speed internet access are increasingly available in Nigeria and blogs are today's revolutionary pamphlets. PsyOps will have to leverage cyberspace capabilities to deliver timely tailored messages to counter or disrupt the instant propaganda messages of terrorists and insurgents. In between, the use of classical media, like the written press, radio and television, should also have a great impact on the transmission of PsyOp messages. In a country where religion is identity, religious broadcasting is actively supported by the state's governments, and has a major impact on shaping the informational environment. As Abdulkader Tayob notes it, "Muslims in the Niger Delta region envy the success of the Christians at taking advantage of the media opportunities provided by state television. Christians in the Muslim dominated North complain of exactly the same marginalisation."⁷³

The target audiences will also have to be identified. The strategic problem of the CPOTF may be defined in Galula's terms: "to find the favorable minority, to organize it in order to mobilize the population against the insurgent minority."⁷⁴ Nigeria has several candidate minorities. The Muslim pious middle class is one of these. It represents an emerging progressive voice that believes in the necessity of "programs that are more oriented toward the people, programs that are not in the interest of the West and its multinational corporations,"⁷⁵ and for which "values of accommodation, tolerance and participation"⁷⁶ represent the core of Nigerian society. For example, the leaders of this progressive Muslim current of thought should be encouraged to voice their concern about Bin Laden's understanding of what Islam is, and say

publicly that the Qur'an condemns violence against Muslims and non-Muslims. As Al-Zawahiri himself recognizes, “the most dangerous weapons of [the Saoudi-American] system are those who outwardly profess advice, guidance and instruction.”⁷⁷ In other words, al Qaeda fears fatwas more than weapons. If weapons can kill people, fatwas can kill the ideology that could motivate northern Nigerians. Western educated Muslims are another layer of the Nigerian society that is in a unique position of interlocutor and facilitator of dialogue between Nigerians. “Very critical of the on-going exercise of expanding the jurisdiction of Shari'ah laws,”⁷⁸ they also express a “healthy skepticism for the geopolitical and strategic designs of the Occidental tradition.”⁷⁹ In the Niger Delta states, PsyOps will have to convince the low-ranking government officials who work most closely with the population—such as policemen, mailmen, mayors, councilmen, and teachers—that if they let insurgencies develop in their states, they will be next on the insurgents’ target list. Indeed, according to Galula’s Bourgeois-Nationalist pattern theory, “killing high ranking counter-insurgent officials serves no purpose since they are too far removed from the population for their deaths to serve as example.”⁸⁰

Foreign internal defense

Foreign Internal Defense (FID) is another way by which U.S. SOF can help Nigeria “to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.”⁸¹ SOF’s contribution to FID usually consists in organizing, training, advising, and assisting HN’s military forces. In Nigeria’s case, there are conventional armed forces that are already organized professional troops with experience in peacekeeping operations. There are also Special Forces, which include an air defense battalion, a paratroop brigade, and a commando battalion.⁸² Ideally, U.S. SOF should establish a strong partnership with both conventional and special forces, because both are important in the fight against an insurgency or in ensuring maritime security. Realistically, SOF

resources are scarce and improving the skills of conventional forces in conducting Counter Insurgency Operations (COIN) or Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) should therefore be left to other organizations—should they be created for that purpose. Nigerian SOF should clearly be the focus for U.S. SOF assistance.

U.S. SOF can certainly help to improve their Nigerian counterpart's capabilities in a variety of domains ranging from individual and team skills to command and control capability. A thorough assessment will be necessary to identify precisely what the areas of improvement are. However, Nigerian SOF will truly be a fully effective tool only when two key enablers will be at their disposal: air power and intelligence. Air power must be understood in its broad sense. Air mobility, transportation, aero-medical evacuation, precision airdrops, ISR and close air support are all part of air power. Even U.S. space capabilities, especially ISR and communication bandwidth, may be included in the assistance package. As the USAF Irregular Warfare Concept emphasizes, "the key to effective joint counterinsurgency operation is seamlessly integrating airpower into a joint strike, mobility, ISR capability to provide friendly forces the tactical and operational advantage that only air and space power can bring to the fight."⁸³ Therefore, the USAF should consider supporting Nigeria's Air Force by providing the necessary funding to refurbish its aircraft, and by sending several of its newly graduated air advisors⁸⁴ to train and advise Nigerian airmen in the use of air power with regard to COIN operations or MIO. The USAF should also consider giving concrete expression to its Irregular Warfare Concept by expanding the 6th Special Operations Squadron (6th SOS) combat aviation advisory with dedicated counter-insurgency utility platforms capable of light airlift, close air support, and surveillance. The USAF could then complete Nigerian Air Force capabilities by providing

Nigerian SOF with light strike, light mobility, heavy mobility, rotary wing, and manned ISR capabilities.⁸⁵

The second role of SOF within FID is to place a significant emphasis on collection, analysis, and dissemination of intelligence. Nigerian SOF will not be able to operate against insurgents, pirates or Islamist terrorists if they are unable to get the right information concerning their target. In other words, “because the enemy in an insurgency is elusive, unknown and most likely indistinguishable from the general population, intelligence operations are crucial.”⁸⁶ Admittedly, ISR capabilities are very helpful in that matter but only when there is already a piece of information to start with. Therefore, U.S. SOF must focus on enhancing human intelligence (HUMINT) collection, analysis and distribution skills of their Nigerian counterparts. They must also place considerable emphasis on crime-scene analysis, social network analysis, interrogation of detainees, forensics and biometrics because “military intelligence begins to resemble police intelligence.”⁸⁷

Military regional schools

As explained earlier in this paper, Nigeria would clearly appreciate to contribute to Africa’s stability by leading a military cooperation program. Nigeria will seriously consider all U.S. proposals for assistance only if they also benefit to Africa's overall development, peace and security. As Africa greatly appreciates multilateralism, a multi-nationally sponsored program will also lend credence to the military U.S.-Nigeria partnership, and facilitate the recognition of Nigeria’s leadership in Western Africa. The USAF, in its Irregular Warfare Concept, suggests the establishment of FID regional centers within the various GCCs⁸⁸. AFRICOM should consider installing its FID center in Nigeria, in cooperation with other nations. France and Britain would be a good option to start with because they are the two other major providers of

security assistance in Africa and because the U.S. is already cooperating with them within the P3 partnership that takes place essentially within the ECOWAS. This FID center would encompass three schools with two associated AU-led response forces. The creation of these schools might complement the French-led program “Renforcement des Capacités Africaines de Maintien de la Paix” (RECAMP) which seeks to encourage the creation of national schools with a regional vocation. RECAMP sponsors countries that create schools that also educate students from other African countries and are dedicated to teach security-related knowledge that complement what other African schools are already teaching.

One of these schools could be a Nigerian Pan-African Special Forces Academy, aiming at training SOF for all African countries able to sustain such forces. Realistically, SOF is an expensive tool and there will probably be few countries willing to send students to such a school. Making this program attractive will then require proposing more than training to soldiers that most of African countries cannot afford. The idea is to associate with this school a multi-national Special Operations Response Force placed under the command of the African Union and trained, organized, and equipped by the academy. This response force would be used for the benefit of AU-led operations.

The payoffs of such an organization would be great. The AU would have SOF units at its disposal to enhance the effectiveness of its conventional forces. The African countries participating in this program will not only reinforce the AU’s ability to conduct military operations but will also benefit from the return of top-level soldiers that can be converted into trainers for their own armed forces. Nigeria would be a leading contributor to the AU’s military capabilities and the sponsoring nations would achieve several goals: promoting the rise of Nigeria as a regional power, improving the AU’s ability to provide security and, above all,

establishing networks of personal relationships that would facilitate communication among African armed forces and between African armed forces and U.S. SOF. These personal relationships may become crucial in solving transnational issues like terrorism, trafficking or insurgencies because they can help to defuse tensions that often arise on the two sides of a common border.

Another school could focus on enhancing maritime capabilities for the countries of the Gulf of Guinea. It would offer a standardization of procedures in the fight against trafficking, piracy and illegal fishing, permit the establishment of strong relationships between the students and would therefore facilitate cooperation in areas where border issues play in favor of the criminals. The same type of response force organization mentioned above could be imagined providing the same payoffs for all the involved parties. This proposal may encounter even more success than the SOF Academy because it would directly help to secure an oil-rich area that is becoming increasingly important to the U.S. and other potential sponsors.

Lastly, the U.S. should consider the creation of a Multi-service Intelligence Advance Officer course that would complement the already existing Malian Military Intelligence Basic Officer Course –Africa.⁸⁹ Intelligence is essential to conduct effectively any military action. It is even more capital for the successful employment of SOF. Establishing an intelligence training school has proven highly efficient in Malaya.⁹⁰ It should also prove efficient for Nigerian forces as well as for the AU's forces. However, knowing how to collect, analyze and exploit intelligence is not enough to fight the current transnational threats Africa faces. Sharing this intelligence with others is vital. That is why this school should not only host foreign military students but also Nigerian police officers who represent a considerable force in Nigeria and consequently an immense reservoir of potential intelligence. Here again, the school should foster the establishment of strong personal relationships in order to facilitate the information sharing-process between nations and services that often do not communicate with each other.

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